



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
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Board of Selectmen minutes, 01/14/2002

Town of Arlington
Board of Selectmen
Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 14, 2002

Present: Mr. Lyons, Chairman, Mrs. Dias, Mr. Hurd, Mr. Greeley,*Mrs. Mahon
Also Present: Mr. Farrington, Mr. Maher, Mrs. Krepelka

A public hearing was held by the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager of the Town of Arlington on Monday, January 14, 2002 in the Selectmen's Chambers of the Robbins Memorial Town Hall, 730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington MA at 7:00 p.m.

The purpose of the hearing is to consider the Urban Renewal Plan for the undertaking of a project by the Arlington Redevelopment Board under state and local law with state financial assistance under Chapter 121B of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, to install, construct, or reconstruct street and other project improvements and to carry out plans for a program of building rehabilitation and other improvements.

Mr. Lyons opened the public hearing on the proposed Urban Renewal Plan for the Arlington Symmes Conservation and Improvement Project. He stated that the Redevelopment Board an "operating agency" under the provisions on Chapter 121B has presented an Urban Renewal Plan for the Symmes property. The Board was created at the request of the Town Meeting by a special act of the legislature in 1971 to act for the Town in urban renewal actions. The Secretary Ex-Officio of the Board, Mr. Alan McClennen, is present this evening to provide the requisite information on the Plan. It is hoped that if we are satisfied, we will vote the appropriate resolution so that the plan can be presented to the Town Meeting for action.

Mr. McClennen stated that he was pleased to be before the Board to present the plan for its approval. He noted that for the record notice of the hearing appeared twice in The Boston Globe once in The Arlington Advocate and on the Town's Web page. He noted that it was also posted in three separate public locations in the Town. Finally, in accordance with the procedures under the statute it was sent by certified mail to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Mr. McClennen informed the Board that he had received notification of receipt.

Mr. McClennen reported on Monday, January 7, 2002, the Redevelopment Board made the necessary findings as the first step in this process. Mr. McClennen stated that the Plan includes acquisition of the 18.1 acre Symmes property by the Town acting through the Redevelopment Board. He indicated that studies have shown that the entire site meets all the requirements for urban renewal action. In order to undertake urban renewal activities, a project area must be designated and a determination must be made that the area is substandard, decadent or blighted, and open. The Symmes site is decadent as it meets the following definition:

"Decadent - detrimental to the sound growth of a community." Mr. McClennen noted that the site has been a hospital for ninety-nine years. He also noted that reports by consultants show major problems in over fifty percent of the floor space... "buildings which are out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation or obsolete, or in need of major maintenance or repair...or because of a substantial change in business or economic conditions." Mr. McClennen noted that the hospital business in Massachusetts is in crisis, and there are numerous hospitals that are closing. "or by reason of any combination of the foregoing conditions." The buildings within the project area are either out of repair or obsolete. The former nurses' residence, although structurally sound, is uninhabitable and severely out of repair. The main hospital building is functionally obsolete and may not be a candidate for conversion to another use through private

enterprise alone. Clearly, more than fifty percent of the gross floor area of these buildings is out of repair or obsolete, thus meeting the definition of decadence.

Mr. McClennen also stated that more than fifty percent of the site contains no buildings and is open, blighted, and difficult to develop due to excessive ledge and extreme slope, and, the existing street patterns make pedestrian and vehicular circulation difficult.

The project area is in a state of decline, and it does not show any indication of rebounding on its own; in fact, the landowner and principal tenant in the face of excessive costs is reducing its use of the building to 25,000 square feet or about fifteen percent of the main hospital building. While totally abandoned, the 25,000 square foot former nurses quarters is vacant and in serious repair.

Mr. McClennen stated that the goal of the urban renewal plan is to redevelop the former Symmes Hospital site into a mixed use, vibrant project area in accordance with the commitments of the Board of Selectmen of March 12, 2001, and the overwhelming vote of the electorate on March 31, 2001. The success of the program will be measured by the extent of social, economic, and physical improvement achieved by correcting deficiencies, eliminating blighting influences, and providing new facilities.

After Mr. McClennen presented the facts, Mr. Lyons opened the hearing and asked for public comments. The following two people spoke:

Mrs. Elsie C. Fiore, 58 Mott Street, stated that she was not objecting to acquiring the Symmes property but objected to it being characterized as an open blighted area and was also concerned about open space and is hopeful that it will not become just balconies, driveways, and parking spaces.

She, also, feels that the Redevelopment Board is being made into an "Authority" and feels that Town Meeting should be involved in making that decision.

Mrs. Jacqueline Harrington, 52 Kenilworth Road, stated that she had several concerns with the Urban Renewal portion of the project as follows:

1. The project area would not by private enterprise alone and without either government subsidy or the exercise of governmental powers be made available for urban renewal, without public involvement, the project site would not be developed. Mrs. Harrington feels that this statement by Mr. McClennen is not true.
2. Mrs. Harrington feels that the project area is not a decadent substandard or blighted open area. She stated that according to Hunneman & TWB that the buildings are not in deplorable condition. The nurses building is structurally sound and only needs gut renovations.
3. Mrs. Harrington feels that the financial plan in place is a "financial model" only and that the operating costs as stated by Mr. McClennen are not true.

Mr. Lyons asked if anyone else would like to speak. No one responded. Mr. Lyons thanked everyone for coming and then stated that the public meeting was closed. The Board unanimously voted to accept the Urban Renewal Plan for the Symmes Arlington Conservation and Improvement Project.

*Mrs. Mahon did not attend the meeting for the public discussion portion, but arrived in time to vote.

Mr. Lyons moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 p.m.

A true record.

Attest:

Marie Krepelka
Board Administrator